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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRISTINA 000842

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DEPT FOR DRL, INL, AND EUR/SCE, NSC FOR BRAUN, USUN FOR  
DREW SCHUFLETOWSKI, USOSCE FOR STEVE STEGER

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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: COM TELLS GJILAN OFFICIALS TO END THE  
VIOLENCE, ACCEPT DECENTRALIZATION

Classified By: COM TINA KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: COM condemned recent violence and urged support for decentralization in a meeting with Gjilan municipal officials from four political parties. She also delivered a message to the fractious ruling LDK party in Gjilan to stop its unhelpful (and violent) infighting. The Albanian leaders responded by saying they reject violence and oppose ethnically-based decentralization, which they said would reverse seven years of integration in their municipality. The sole Serb leader at the meeting said Serbs generally feel secure in Gjilan, but will only stay if the new municipalities created through the status process have substantive powers. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) COM met in the southeastern Kosovo municipality of Gjilan on October 3 with:

- Xhemajl Hyseni: Mayor and Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) Branch President
- Lirije Kajtazi: Deputy Mayor and LDK caucus leader
- Izmi Zeka: Deputy Branch President of the opposition Democratic Party of Kosovo (DPK)
- Sabedin Kadriu: Branch President of the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK)
- Enver Muji: Gjilan CEO
- Bozidar Peric: Deputy Mayor and Serb from the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS)

13. (SBU) Gjilan, a stronghold of the ruling LDK, has been the site of recent car bombings which may have been the result of infighting in the run-up to selecting a new LDK party president. Its municipal boundaries will be affected by decentralization through the proposed creation of Serb-majority Partesh municipality and an expanded Serb Novo Brdo. Opponents of the decentralization proposal held a peaceful protest on September 9, the same day Gjilan's Municipal Assembly called for the Kosovar negotiating team to

withdraw its Partesh offer.

#### COM to Gjilan Leaders: No to Violence, Decentralization Inevitable

14. (C) COM made two points clear at the outset: violence is unacceptable and counter-productive, and decentralization is in Kosovo's interests. She said that Kosovo and Gjilan itself are the focus of international attention, and any violence, either against minorities or among Albanians, has a direct negative impact on the status process. The COM stressed the USG is solidly behind UN Special Envoy Ahtisaari, the Vienna negotiating process, and, therefore, decentralization. Kosovo and Gjilan will need to accept the eventual settlement package and then implement it. She added that complaints about a package that they have yet to see only complicate the search for a final status resolution.

#### Opposition to "Ethnically Based" Decentralization

15. (C) Mayor Hyseni told the COM that everyone in Gjilan is against violence because it hurts the municipality's image and threatens the safe environment there. He acknowledged that Kosovo's status resolution has a price, but was concerned by the lack of information from the Kosovar negotiators on the Unity Team. He claimed that Gjilan did not oppose decentralization per se, but was against the damage ethnically-based decentralization would inflict on what he maintained was a tolerant and integrated municipality. Hyseni said he supported the idea of new, Serb-majority municipalities, but wanted them to reflect the multi-ethnic reality of Gjilan, since mono-ethnic municipalities would not be functional or sustainable.

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16. (C) PDK's Zeka echoed Hyseni, arguing that while the party was not against reform in general, the form of decentralization proposed in the Vienna negotiations ran counter to the interests of Kosovo's development. His comments were echoed by AAK's Gjilan Branch President Kadriu, who lamented that the decentralization plan was created without discussion with the affected municipalities, and accused the international community of contradicting its own stated desire for a multi-ethnic society.

#### Serb Leader Says Gjilan Serbs Will Accept Results

17. (C) Deputy Mayor Peric, the sole Serb leader at the meeting, said Serbs feel secure living in Gjilan, and that even though they have not been part of the status negotiations, they will accept whatever compromise results. They will stay in Kosovo, he said, if municipalities have substantive and meaningful authority for important issues like health and education. Peric noted that the biggest problem for Serbs is returns, adding that over the past few months thirty Serb families have left Gjilan.

#### COM: Stop Infighting

18. (C) COM commended Gjilan's accomplishments in building ethnic tolerance and inclusion. However, she said, not all of Kosovo has been as successful, and the settlement reached in Vienna will need to provide strong guarantees in order to convince Serbs to remain in Kosovo. She reiterated the need for the municipalities of Gjilan, Viti, and Lipjan not to attract negative attention or be seen as obstacles in this process, and stressed the importance of unity both among and within parties in support of Kosovo's negotiating team.

19. (C) COMMENT: Aside from the issue of LDK infighting, there are two problems in Gjilan. The first is that the Unity Team has not adequately explained the decentralization process and its importance to a final status agreement. The second problem is that Gjilan leaders recognize their municipality will pay the price for a Kosovo-wide solution.

We will continue to advocate in support of decentralization and -- more importantly -- encourage the Unity Team to do the same. We will also continue to condemn violence, whether of the inter-ethnic or intra-party variety.

¶10. (U) U.S. Office Pristina clears this cable in its entirety for release to U.N. Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.  
KAIDANOW